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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to obtain information about the attitudes of professors at a state college toward students entering college with a deficiency in one or more of the basic skills. Subjects were 492 professors who completed a sixteen-item inventory. The results of the study indicated that professors were "undecided" in attitudes toward basic skills students. The professors' attitudes toward the admission of basic skills students to college and their view of the academic standards of a college ranged from undecided to slightly negative. The professors' perceptions of these students and attitudes toward the progress of a class ranged from undecided to slightly positive. No significant differences were found in terms of sex, faculty rank or number of years of experience. The largest percentages of responses in all areas reported were "undecided." (RL)

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A SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE TEACHING FACULTY AT A STATE COLLEGE TOWARD STUDENTS IN THE BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMS: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

A Master's Project

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Reading

by
Teresa Buckley-Byrne

May, 1981

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many college professors and administrators throughout the United States have become very concerned with the poor academic preparation of freshmen. A large number of students admitted to colleges are deficient in one or more of the basic skills which include the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Some of the professors' complaints about these underprepared students are: the students cannot read; they cannot develop logical paragraphs; their writing is filled with errors; they cannot perform basic mathematical functions; S.A.T. scores have dropped; standards have been lowered; and easier level texts must be used (Usova, 1979). Thus, as a result of these basic skills problems, many educators find themselves questioning the concept of higher education for these students. The issue of whether or not the college should be responsible for the teaching of remedial skills is, also, questionable and is reflected by many college professors' diverse attitudes toward the remedial student.

Years ago, a college's primary function was to educate the elite and make gentlemen out of rich peoples' sons. These students had strong academic backgrounds and attended college to become cultured in the areas of literature, history, and classical languages. The elite society supported and managed higher education, but part of the problem that exists in education today is based on the fact that higher education is now serving the masses (Mood, 1973). Whereas education of the elite was concerned with one specific group with strong college preparation, education is now attempting a very difficult task, trying to serve all

students from varied academic and social backgrounds. Mood (1973) reports that the function of present day education is to provide students with a broad understanding of their country and the world, and a large part of this shift in purpose is because colleges had to find a way to maintain their budgets.

As a result of the move to educate the masses, many college professors may feel that their academic standards have been threatened. A very important question that many professors are beginning to ask is "Should higher education be for everyone?" (Furniss, 1971). With the adoption of open admission policies and the changes in admission requirements in many colleges, many professors have been faced with making decisions about their courses. These decisions may involve changing course materials and the structure of their courses to meet the needs of these remedial level college students.

With these changes in education, many different viewpoints have emerged. Furniss (1971) states that with the changes in admission requirements, many professors have begun to make changes in their courses. On the contrary, Williams (1977) reports that many faculty members in the City Universities of New York which have open admission policies have very negative attitudes toward remedial college students. Some of these professors hold the viewpoint that these students could never succeed in the academic world. In fact, Williams (1977) states that "many of the open admissions students were forced to be taught by faculty members who did not academically believe in their capabilities and were simply in the process of proving their point of view". Unfortunately, it is felt that the students suffer when such negative attitudes exist.

Thus, the goals of higher education are questioned by

professors and each professor must come to terms with his view of higher education. Williams (1977) divides professors' attitudes into three distinct categories: the elistist, the egalitarian, and the remedial. A description of these attitudes states that:

> Those who subscribe to an elistist conception of the system maintain that only the ablest and brightest should receive higher education. Those who advocate an egalitarian plan believe that everyone should have an opportunity to go to college, and that the investment of resources should be about equal across the spectrum of ability. Finally, advocates of a remedial or "social welfare" plan feel that special attention should be devoted to the lowest-performing and most disadvantaged members of society. (p.12)

With such dissimilar viewpoints, the basic skills student[1] may be exposed to many attitudes within a college, and it is felt by the investigator that these attitudes may influence his/her performance.

Theoretical Formulation

This study surveyed all of the faculty members of a large state university where Basic Skills Programs are offered. Since these programs have only been in existence for four years, this investigation was conducted to measure professors' attitudes toward students who have been found to be deficient in one or more of the essential basic skills that are required to successfully complete a college career. The most basic question that this study attempted to answer was: What are the overall attitudes of professors toward students who enter college with a deficiency in basic skills?

Other pertinent questions which resulted from this study were: (1) What are the attitudes of faculty members toward the admission of basic skills students to a four year college or university? (2) How do

[1]The term basic skills student will be referred to often throughout this study and will be defined as those students who did not meet the cut-off scores on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test.

professors view the academic standards of a college where these students are admitted? (3) What are the professors' perceptions of these students? Do they view the students as successful or unsuccessful; motivated or unmotivated? and, (4) Do professors feel that basic skills students affect the progress of a class?

In an attempt to determine if the professors' sex, faculty rank, or number of years taught at the college had a bearing on attitudes, other, more specific questions resulted. These questions were: (1) Do attitudes of male professors differ from attitudes of female professors on the issue of basic skills? (2) Is faculty rank significantly related to attitude toward basic skills students? and, (3) Is the number of years professors have taught at the college significantly related to attitude?

This study employed the following operational definitions:

basic skills----------"those skills of thought and communication without which an individual cannot take advantage of the opportunities offered by a college education" (Edge, 1979) refers specifically to the language of words and mathematics

higher education----------a two or four year college or university

attitude----------"how an individual feels or what he believes" (Best, 1977)

negative attitude----------determined by combining the percentages of responses labeled disagree and strongly disagree

positive attitude----------determined by combining the percentages of responses labeled agree and strongly agree

remedial----------"students who are not academically prepared for college-level study; those of low ability or those who lack certain educational experiences" (Holland, 1978)

The following assumptions prefaced this study:

1. Professors do have definite attitudes about the admission and presence of basic skills students in the college setting.
2. Faculty members' attitudes toward basic skills students are present and measurable in the sample group.
3. Professors responding to the survey have given honest responses.

By their nature, research studies have limitations. When scoring an attitude scale, one can never be sure as to what one is actually scoring. There are a number of internal and external factors related to an attitude survey that can bias the respondent to a favorable or unfavorable degree. Oppenheim (1966) reports many faults in the design of a survey: "sampling errors; errors due to nonresponse; bias due to questionnaire design and question wording; unreliability or lack of validity of various techniques used; varieties of interviewer bias; respondent unreliability, ignorance, misunderstanding, reticence, or bias; bias in recording and coding the responses; errors in processing and statistical analysis; and faulty interpretation of the results." (p. 21)

The particular instrument used in this study is not only subject to the general limitations cited, but also to its own particular weaknesses. The fact that the writer assumed that the college faculty would be familiar with the term, basic skills student caused much confusion. The writer should have explicitly defined this term. It is felt that this limitation may have influenced the lack of returns because professors were not familiar with this term.

The demographic information that was asked for was another weakness in the study. Instead of asking for the department in which professors teach, the overall discipline should have been requested. Many respondents left the department blank and may have felt that this information was too specific. Another aspect of the demographic information which should have been eliminated was the racial background since the majority of the professors are white. The other ethnic groups may have felt that this information would be used to pinpoint the attitude of a specific group.

The major limitation of the investigation was due to the lack of information on this subject. In designing the survey the writer had no other survey to use for comparative purposes. Thus, some of the respondents commented that some of the items on the survey were biased and too global. Lastly, the results may not be representative of the entire faculty to whom the surveys were sent since the returns reflected the attitudes and information of only those professors concerned enough to fill out the survey and send it back. The results of the survey were based on the responses of one hundred and seventy-eight professors or thirty-seven percent of the professors who completed and returned the survey.

Purpose

It is realized that the role and attitude of a college professor may undergo a change as a result of the admission of large numbers of basic skills students. The role of the college professor has always been one of promoting intellectual thought, but with the admission of these students, the professor may feel that the quality of higher education has been affected. It is possible that this may cause a conflict in his/her attitude towards the basic skills student. This study surveyed all of the professors at a large state college in an attempt to determine the overall attitudes of college

professors toward basic skills students.

While the purpose of this investigation was not to make a correlation between a professor's attitude and its effect on a student's academic performance, it was felt that the results of the survey would provide information that could be utilized in developing research studies in this area. It would be quite interesting to conduct studies to determine if correlations could be made. Although the area of attitudes of basic skills students and professors is unexplored, the writer feels that significant studies could result.

Problem

The problem of the proper placement of remedial level college students has been addressed by various colleges throughout the United States, but New Jersey was the first state to mandate a college skills testing program in March, 1977 (Braun, 1977). Many colleges had lowered their admission requirements in years prior to 1977 because of a slow decline in student enrollment, but found themselves burdened with a very serious academic problem as a result. The State Chancellor of Higher Education in New Jersey in 1977, Ralph A. Dungan, recognized the severity of this problem and took action. Dungan mandated a skills test to be administered to all incoming freshmen in public colleges, and made requests to the colleges to provide remediation to those students deficient in the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.

A pilot test was given by the individual public colleges in the fall of 1977, but the New Jersey Basic Skills Council developed a uniform test. This test is called the New

Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT) and has been used by all of the public colleges since 1978. The NJCBSPT is given to all in-coming freshmen after they have been admitted to one of the colleges. The results of the test are used strictly for placement and the test is designed to determine if students possess the fundamental skills needed for success in a college program (Edge, 1979). If a student is found to be lacking proficiency in one of the basic skills, he is then required to attend remediation classes.

The results of the NJCBSPT for 1978 and 1979 have indicated that "large numbers of high school graduates arrive at the college underprepared in the basic skills" (Edge, 1979). The table below will describe the results of the NJCBSPT for the academic years 1978 and 1979:

Results of the NJCBSPT for 1978 and 1979

Year	Number Tested	% Needing Remediation		
		Reading	Writing	Algebra
Fall 1978	42,984	39%	43%	57%
Fall 1979	47,725	32%	32%	61%

Results taken from Edge, 1978 and 1979

With such astounding percentages of students lacking proficiency in the basic skills, it is felt that professors have definite attitudes toward these students. Although the professors have no way of knowing whether or not they have basic skills students in their classes, it is felt that the professors may be able to detect these students by the quality of their work.

The investigator feels that a large part of the problem that exists with regard to the basic skills students is the fact that most professors feel that basic skills should be taught in the high school. Although professors may recognize

the severity of this problem, it is felt that professors may not feel that it is their responsibility to teach skills that should have been learned before reaching the college level. Edge (1979) reports that it is hoped that the high schools will soon be able to control the basic skills problems so that the colleges will not have to provide remediation. But, Edge further states that the colleges will have to continue to provide remediation to these students until this problem is resolved.

The writer holds the position of Graduate Assistant at the college and tutors students with deficiencies in reading and writing. Many of the students have expressed concern because some of their professors have exhibited negative attitudes. Some examples of the students' complaints were: "I'm afraid to ask questions because the professor makes me feel that my questions are stupid"; "the professor answers my questions in a sarcastic way"; "I'm afraid to ask for extra help"; and, "the professor would not answer my question because he said I should know that material". These comments represented a small sample of the student population, but, nevertheless, represented a negative attitude. Thus, this investigator hypothesized that attitudes of professors would be negative toward basic skills students.

This project was delimited to the college faculty at one state college in New Jersey. The study was also delimited to one month and measured attitudes of professors toward basic skills students.

Method and Procedures

This investigation of the attitudes of college professors toward basic skills students was conducted on the campus of a large state college. All full-time professors received the survey. The writer inquired about

permission needed prior to the distribution of the survey, but no formal permission was needed. The survey and cover letter were distributed through campus mail in the beginning of February. The professors were asked to return the survey by campus mail within one week to the Reading Center of this college. The amount of returns within the first week was high (130), but dropped considerably within the next three weeks when only 51 surveys were returned. After a period of one month, 181 surveys had been returned representing 36.7% of the total population. At this point, it was determined that the majority of surveys were returned and the data were analyzed.

The data gathering instrument was an attitude survey consisting of sixteen statements with a Likert-type five degree response scale. (See Appendix) Responses included "strongly agree", "agree", "undecided", "disagree", and "strongly disagree". Since no pertinent survey was available, the writer designed all of the statements. As the literature on this topic is also limited, the idea for these statements stemed from newspaper articles, journal articles, and discussions with professors.

The sixteen items on the attitude survey were in the form of declarative statements. These items were designed to collect information on four variables. Each of these variables is part of the cluster of beliefs that makes up the professor's attitude toward basic skills students. Table 1 lists these four variables and the numbers of items from the instrument which elicited information for each variable.

Table 1

Survey Variables

	Variable	Item #
1.	Faculty attitude towards admission of basic skills student to a college	1,3,6,8,12,14
2.	Faculty view of academic standards of college where basic skills students are admitted	2,5,
3.	Professors perceptions of basic skills students - motivated or unmotivated; successful or unsuccessful	4,7,9,13,15,16
4.	Attitude toward basic skills student with regard to affecting the progress of a class	10,11

Each statement was analyzed and labeled positive or negative in order to measure the various degrees of attitude and perception. Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, and 16 were declared negative and items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, and 15 were declared positive. The response scale for each positive item was weighted with a range of five to one, giving strong agreement with a positive item the strongest weight. Conversely, strong agreement with a negative item was given the least weight and ranged from one to five. The higher the score, the more positive the professor's attitude was measured toward the basic skills student.

In order to effectively administer the attitude survey designed by this writer, a pilot test was used to increase the reliability of the statements. The pilot test was sent to five professors at different colleges in New Jersey and represented a sample of professors who teach in colleges

which have Basic Skills Programs. The names of the participants were suggested by two professors at the college. The pilot test was conducted in early December and each participant was sent a cover letter, attitude survey, and evaluation form. Four out of the five professors responded to the survey and revisions made to the attitude inventory were based on the professors' comments.

Content validity for the survey was established through the construction of a test blueprint (See Table 1). Validity was further determined as the items correlated with the objectives and information sought. The equal length Spearman-Brown Formula and the Guttman Split-Half Formula were used to estimate the reliability of the survey. A correlation coefficient of .91 was obtained utilizing the Spearman-Brown Formula and a coefficient of .89 was established using the Guttman Split-Half.

For the purposes of the study the data were analyzed through mean scores, percentages, and Chi-square. The Computer Center at the college furnished the data analysis for returned responses. In order to present tables reflecting positive and negative attitudes, the writer grouped the response options. For example, a positive attitude was obtained by adding the "strongly agree" and "agree" percentages. A negative attitude was established by combining the percentages of "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

In order for the writer to carry out this study, it was necessary to investigate and explore certain areas which contained information related to this study. Since Basic Skills Programs have only been in existence for a few years, the research in this area was quite limited. The following areas which deal with the attitudes of college professors and teachers toward students will be discussed: (1) professors' attitudes and perceptions of the reading and writing skills of college students; (2) attitudes of English professors toward remedial English; and, (3) the effect of teachers' attitudes on the student's performance. Following is a review of the relevant literature on attitude.

Review of Research

This project was concerned with the attitudes and perceptions of college faculty members toward basic skills students. It appears from a review of the research that this study may be the first investigation in this area. To date most research in the area of basic skills has been concerned with evaluating the effectiveness of the programs. There is also literature on the teaching techniques which have proved to be effective with the remedial student, but, unfortunately, attitudes have been unexplored.

The writer examined the Reading Research Quarterly, the Education Index, ERIC, and numerous other sources, but found nothing on the project topic. After many extensive hours of research, the writer decided to have a computer search of ERIC and the Psychological Abstracts performed.

An appointment was made at a library where such searches are conducted, and the first task was to list the descriptors or key words that could be fed into the computer. Many combinations of descriptors were fed into the computer, but four particular descriptors yielded relevant articles. These key words were: basic skills-remedial; research report; attitudes; and, teachers-college, and uncovered thirty-six articles which related to all of the descriptors. Each of the articles was carefully reviewed, however, only a few of the articles could be applied to this study.

The studies discussed below have been grouped according to the areas identified in the Background of Study. All of the studies measured attitudes, but utilized a variety of methods and procedures.

Studies of Professors' Attitudes and Perceptions of the Reading and Writing Skills of College Students

Behrens (1977) surveyed 400 faculty members at the American University in Washington, D.C. utilizing a short answer questionnaire. The purpose of the study was to measure faculty perceptions of student literacy. The survey was returned by 128 or 32% of the professors. The faculty members were asked to comment on the extent to which they perceived a decline or improvement in student skills over the past five or ten years. Forty-one percent of the respondents reported that writing skills had declined "to some extent" and 37% thought that writing skills had declined "to a great extent". In reporting the percentages for the perception of reading skills, 59% felt that reading skills had declined "to some extent" and 14% felt that reading had declined "to a great extent". Only 3% of the professors felt that there was an improvement in writing skills and 2% perceived an improvement in reading skills. Behrens reported that

a few professors commented that the improvement in writing and reading skills in the past few years was a result of the "back to basics" movement in the high schools.

Lamberts and Ellison (1976) conducted a study to obtain information on the levels of students' skills as perceived by faculty and students. Two surveys were distributed at a community college in Oregon and a total of 150 full-time faculty members (or 74.3%) completed and returned the survey. A majority of both faculty and students agreed that reading comprehension and listening skills were very important factors in terms of the success of a college student. Seventy-seven percent of the faculty and 51 percent of the students felt that testing prior to registration would be very helpful for the purposes of placement and guidance. However, discrepancies between student and faculty perceptions were cited in terms of the areas in which students were having difficulty. The majority of faculty members found skill deficiencies in the areas of reading comprehension, English grammar, spelling, and essay writing, while the students did not feel that these were problem areas.

Stice (1976) used a questionnaire survey to determine the attitudes of faculty members toward reading at the college level in terms of student ability, teaching, and knowledge of techniques available to improve students' reading skills. One hundred and seventy-five questionnaires were distributed to faculty members at Tennessee State University and results were based on 72 responses, representing 45 percent of the population. Sixty-three percent of the professors indicated that the majority of their students cannot successfully read and comprehend the text materials used. Of this 63 percent, more than half of the professors taught science, mathematics, English, or history which represent the academic subjects which

require sophisticated reading skills. Stice stated that it appears that college teachers are doing little to help improve the reading abilities of students, but 66 percent of the respondents did state that they were willing to receive assistance in learning techniques to help improve students' reading abilities. Of the teachers responding to the questionnaire, 93.6 percent expressed the position that while the college teacher should deal with reading difficulties, it is not possible due to the lack of time and training.

Attitudes of English Professors toward Remedial English

Holland (1978) used a self-reporting inventory that consisted of eighteen statements and utilized the Likert-type scale. The purpose of this pilot study was to measure professors' attitudes toward remedial English. English professors at Behrend College in Pennsylvania were selected for the study and all ten members responded.

The results of the survey were reported in terms of the six survey variables which were: remedial English requires teacher skill; remedial English requires teacher time; remedial English is effective; college teachers are interested in teaching remedial English; teaching remedial English should be related to the rank and academic degree held by faculty; and, remedial English is a valid offering for an English department. The mean score for the entire group was 3.12 which represents an attitude of indecision toward remedial English. The highest mean score in terms of the survey variables was 3.6 for the variable which sought information on whether teaching remedial English should be related to rank and academic degree. Holland concluded that "rank and tenure should not be denied those faculty teaching primarily remedial English". The lowest mean score was 2.9 for the attitude variable which dealt

with instructor interest and suggested that these English professors found the teaching of remedial English less interesting and important than other aspects of their jobs.

The Effect of Teacher Attitude on Student Performance

Whitehall (1949) conducted a study to determine how the teacher affects the social-emotional climate of a classroom. Four judges were chosen to rate teachers' statements with regard to producing positive or negative feelings in a group. The statements were categorized and referred to as the climate index. Experimental groups were chosen to test the climate index and were asked to react to the positive and negative statements. Whitehall concluded that statements categorized according to the climate index as likely to produce negative feelings tend to be reacted to with negative feelings by individuals to whom they are addressed. It was also concluded that positive statements produced positive feelings.

The famous "Oak School" experiment was conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968. The study purpose was to determine if several, randomly selected, elementary school children could be expected to "bloom" (show significant intellectual and academic growth) over the course of the school year if the teachers of these students were given the information (before the school year began) that these students possessed potential. The results of the study shown that those students who were expected to "bloom" did, in fact, show marked academic growth after the year. Those children who were not expected to "bloom" did not show such intellectual gains. Rosenthal and Jacobson concluded that these results strongly suggest that teachers' expectations affect the academic performance of students.

Lastly, Davidson and Lang (1960) conducted a study to determine the relationship between children's perceptions of their teachers' feelings toward them and their feelings about themselves. Three variables were considered: self-perception, classroom behavior, and academic achievement. The subjects consisted of 203 students who attended fourth, fifth, and sixth grades at a New York City public school. The students were given a Checklist of Trait Names designed by the researchers and were asked to respond to the adjectives on the checklist in terms of how they felt their teacher viewed them and how they perceived themselves. The results indicated a positive correlation between children's perceptions of their teachers' feelings toward them and children's perceptions of themselves. The results further indicated a positive relationship between favorable perception of teachers' feelings and academic achievement, and a positive relationship between favorable perception of teachers' feelings and desirable classroom behavior.

Criticism and Summary

A review of the literature has produced studies dealing with: attitudes of professors toward the skills of college students; attitudes of professors toward remedial English; and, the effect of a teacher's attitude on the academic performance of students. It is obvious from the limited number of studies found that there is a need for further research into the above areas if professors are going to effectively deal with basic skills students. Researchers have asked professors to estimate the decline of students' skills, but have neglected to ask professors to respond to the way they feel about the remedial-level college student. From the studies cited professors reported a great decline in skills, but research needs to determine

the attitudes of students and professors.

This investigator included the studies on the effect of a teacher's attitude on the student's academic performance because it is suspected that a relationship may exist between professors' attitudes and the performance of basic skills students. Research studies need to be conducted in this vital area.

Holland's study (1978) reported that professors view the teaching of remedial English as a very uninteresting task. Very serious implications could result from such an attitude because it is felt that such a negative attitude could affect the performance of students enrolled in such a course. Thus, professors need to be made aware of their attitudes and the effect it could have on their students.

Agency Setting

This attitude survey took place in a state college in New Jersey. The college is one of the eight state schools and is a publicly supported coeducational college. The institution is located on a very large campus and has been in existence since the early 1900's. At the present time the enrollment of students is approximately 14,500. The college is open to all part and full-time students regardless of sex, race, religion, or national origin. A variety of degrees are offered on both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

The college has three remedial centers designed to meet the needs of the basic skills students: the Writing Workshop, the Mathematics Laboratory, and the Reading and Study Skills Center. Remedial courses offered by the Reading Center and the Mathematics Laboratory were developed as a result of the students' scores on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test, but the Writing Workshop had been in existence prior to the test.

The Centers strive to improve the students' skills which are needed for taking college level courses. Most of the instruction in the Centers is based on small group instruction or one-to-one tutoring. The students are encouraged to work at their own pace. The remedial courses in mathematics and reading do not provide credit, but the Writing Workshop does provide credit. This policy of credit for one course and not for the others will undergo a change beginning with the fall semester of 1981 as students will be granted credit for the reading and math classes. Since the Basic Skills Programs at this college have only been in existence for a few years, constant adaptations result.

This college is unique in that it provides a remedial level speech course, also. Although the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test does not test the speech ability of students, this college developed a program of their own, whereby all incoming freshmen are given a speech test. Students whom are found to be lacking in their speech abilities are required to attend a remedial level speech course which develops the student's oral expression. Credit is given for this course and the students may use this credit for graduation. (Whittenburg, 1980).

Description of the Study Sample

The attitude survey was distributed to 492 faculty members at this large state college. The total full-time faculty population is 504, but the missing 12 professors were either on sabbatical or leave of absence. In describing the entire faculty, 334 professors are male and 170 are female. With regard to racial background: 18 are black, eight are Hispanic, three are American Indian, 25 are Asian, and 450 are white. In terms of faculty rank: 109 are full professors, 186 are assistant

professors, 147 are associate professors, and 63 are instructors. With reference to the years taught at the college: 275 have taught at the college for ten years or more, 96 have taught at the college for seven to nine years, 39 have taught for four to six years, 79 have been teaching for one to three years, and 15 professors were hired within the last year. Approximately 77 percent of the faculty members have doctorates or terminal degrees appropriate to their disciplines. Overall, the professors are described as a homogeneous group with regard to race and educational background.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The concern of this study was the assessment of attitudes and perceptions of college professors toward basic skills students. The survey variables included in the study covered four areas and were discussed in detail in Chapter One. The data will be presented in tabular and narrative form for the eight questions addressed by the study.

General Attitude

The data in Table 1 show the mean scores for the survey variables and the mean score for the entire survey. The data were organized to reveal professors' attitudes toward specific areas and to determine the overall attitudes of professors.

The mean scores were reported in terms of the response options on the survey. A five represented a response of "strongly agree" on the survey and indicated agreement with a statement. A response option of one represented a response of "strongly disagree" and indicated the most negative attitude. Thus, a mean score of five indicated the most positive attitude, a mean score of three reported an undecided attitude, and a mean score of one indicated a negative attitude.

Table 1

Mean Scores for Survey Variables
and Overall Survey
N=178

Variable	Mean Score
Attitude toward admission	2.7
View of academic standards	2.8
Perception of students	3.2
Attitude toward progress	3.5
Total score	3.0

As a group the 178 professors showed an overall mean score of 3.0 which indicated an undecided attitude. This score was based on the responses of professors to all items on the survey inventory.

The first two variables listed in Table 1 indicated an undecided to slightly negative attitude. Six items in the survey inventory provided data for analysis of attitudes toward the admission of basic skills students to college. The mean score for this variable was 2.7 and reflected an undecided and slightly negative attitude. The view of the academic standards where basic skills students are admitted was represented in two items. The mean score for this variable was 2.8 and also indicated a slightly negative attitude.

The last two variables cited reported an undecided to slightly positive attitude. Six statements were used to determine the professors' perceptions of these students. This survey variable showed a mean score of 3.2 which represented an undecided, but slightly positive attitude. A mean score of 3.5 was reported for the variable which measured the attitudes of professors toward the effect that basic skills students have on the progress of a class and was determined through two statements on the survey. This score indicated the most positive attitude.

The mean scores for the four variables did not reflect a consistency of attitudes of professors. The faculty members were somewhat negative with regard to the variables which determined their attitude toward the admission of basic skills students and their view of the academic standards of a college. On the other hand, professors expressed a slightly positive attitude toward their perceptions of these students and their attitude toward the progress of the class. Thus, no strong

attitudes, either positive or negative, were displayed and this lack of a strong attitude corresponded with the undecided attitude reported by the overall mean score.

Attitudes Reported in Terms of Survey Variables

The percentages for each of the survey variables are presented in Table 2. This table was designed specifically to answer the four research questions which deal with these variables. The data were described in terms of the five response options which were labeled "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with "undecided" in the center. When further describing these percentages, a positive attitude was determined by combining the percentages of "agree" and "strongly agree" responses and a negative attitude was determined by adding the percentages "disagree" and "strongly disagree".

Table 2

Percentages of Faculty Attitudes in Terms of Survey Variables
N=178

Variable	Str Agr	Agr	Und	Dis	Str Dis
Attitude toward admission	4%	20%	25%	42%	9%
View of academic standards	8	20	31	29	12
Perception of students	3	35	49	13	---
Attitude toward progress	20	36	26	13	5

Str Agr - strongly agree
Agr - agree
Und - undecided
Dis - disagree
Str Dis - strongly disagree

On the whole, the professors' attitudes toward the admission of basic skills students to college was negative as 51 percent responded "strongly disagree" or "disagree" to the items which correlated with this variable. While more than one half of the professors indicated a negative view, 25 percent responded undecided, and 24 percent reported a positive attitude. A large percentage (41%) of professors viewed the academic standards of a college where these students are admitted negatively. Thirty-one percent responded undecided and 28 percent viewed the academic standards positively.

Of all the survey variables, the professors were most undecided about their perception of these students. This variable asked the professors to respond to how they perceived the students in terms of motivation and success. Forty-nine percent of the professors were undecided about this variable, 38 percent perceived these students positively, while 13 percent perceived these students negatively.

The professors responded most positively with regard to their attitude toward the progress of a class when basic skills students are present. Fifty-six percent of the professors responded positively, 26 percent were undecided, and 18 percent responded with a negative attitude.

Attitudes Reported in Terms of Sex, Faculty Rank and Years Taught

The data in Tables 3, 4, and 5 describe the attitudes of the professors toward basic skills students in terms of the variables: sex, faculty rank, and number of years taught at this college. These tables were designed to determine if significant differences existed in the professors' attitudes based on the variables listed.

Chi-square tables were computed and no significant differences were reported using the .05 criterion of significance. The tables are described in percentages and reflect the professors' responses to all of the items on the survey. Positive and negative attitudes were determined by combining the response options.

The data in Table 3 describe the percentages of professors' attitudes toward basic skills students in terms of the number of years they have been teaching at the college. The years were grouped in the following categories: one to three years, four to six years, seven to nine years, and ten years or more. Table 3 attempted to determine if there was a relationship between attitude and faculty rank and if years a professor has taught at the college reflected a specific attitude, either positive or negative. The level of significance reported for this variable was 0.84 which was non-significant at the .05 criterion.

Table 3

Attitudes of Professors Reported in Terms of Number of Years Taught at the College
N=178 *

Attitude toward basic skills students	Years Taught				
	1-3 yrs. (N=33)	4-6 yrs. (N=17)	7-9 yrs. (N=29)	10+ yrs. (N=99)	Total
Positive	4%	1%	6%	13%	24%
Negative	6	2	5	15	28

48% + 52% = 100%

*48% of the professors responded undecided

Overall, the largest percentage of professors fell in the undecided range. Forty-eight percent of the professors responded undecided. Professors in three of the four categories indicated a more negative than positive attitude. This negative attitude was indicated by those professors who have taught at the college for one to three years, four to six years, and ten years or more. Professors who have taught at the college for seven to nine years were the only group that shown a more positive attitude, but this was only by one percent. Although the majority of professors reported an undecided attitude, 28 percent of the professors displayed a negative attitude, and 24 percent reported a positive attitude. The data in Table 3 did not reveal a strong attitude based on the groupings of years taught at the college.

The data in Table 4 were designed to describe the attitudes of female and male professors toward basic skills students. The table attempted to answer the research question which dealt with whether attitudes of male professors differ from attitudes of female professors on the issue of basic skills students. The level of significance determined for this variable was 0.57 which was non-significant.

The data in Table 5 were designed to describe the attitudes of professors in terms of their faculty rank - full professor, assistant professor, associate professor, and instructor. The question that this table addressed was whether a professor's faculty rank was significantly related to attitude toward basic skills students. The table was also designed to describe the percentages of positive and negative attitudes based on the rank of professors. The level of significance computed for this variable was 0.64 which was non-significant.

Table 4

Attitudes of Male and Female Professors
Toward Basic Skills Students
N=170*

Attitude toward basic skills students	Sex		
	Female (N=54)	Male (N=116)	Total
Positive	7%	15%	22%
Negative	10	18	28

50% + 50% = 100%

50% of the survey respondents indicated an undecided response

* N=170 as eight respondents did not identify sex

Table 5

Attitudes of Professors Reported
by Faculty Rank
N=173*

Attitude toward basic skills students	Faculty Rank				
	Full* (N=68)	Asdt.* (N=58)	Assoc.* (N=29)	Inst.* (N=18)	Total
Positive	8%	8%	5%	3%	24%
Negative	14	6	5	3	28

48% + 52%=100%

48% responded undecided

* N=173 as five professors did not indicate faculty rank

*Full - full professor
Asdt. - assistant professor
Assoc. - associate
Inst. - instructor

In Table 4 the majority of professors' attitudes (50%), both male and female, indicated indecision toward the issue of basic skills students. The percentages of undecided responses were not included in the table, but definitely outweighed the positive and negative responses for the male and female professors. Both male and female professors reported more negative than positive attitudes. Male professors reported the highest percentage of negative attitude, but also represented a larger number of respondents to the survey. The smallest percentage of professors indicated a positive attitude toward these students.

The largest percentage of professors indicated an undecided attitude in Table 5. Full professors made up the largest number of respondents and indicated a more negative than positive attitude toward basic skills students. Assistant professors, on the contrary, indicated more positive than negative attitudes. Both associate professors and instructors indicated equal percentages of positive and negative attitudes. Based on the faculty ranks of professors, no strong attitudes were disclosed.

Summary

The results of the study indicated that professors fell within the range of undecided in attitude toward basic skills students. The professors' attitude toward the admission of basic skills students to college and their view of the academic standards of a college ranged from undecided to slightly negative. The professors' perceptions of these students and attitude toward the progress of a class ranged from undecided to slightly positive. The professors' attitudes based

on the variables of sex, faculty rank, and number of years taught at the college revealed an overall attitude of indecision, also. No significant differences were found in terms of these variables. The largest percentages of attitudes in all areas reported an undecided attitude.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The major purpose of this study was to ascertain the overall attitudes of professors toward basic skills students. The instrument utilized was a self-reporting inventory and was distributed to 492 professors. The results of the survey were based on 178 responses to the survey and this represented 37 percent of the population.

The total number of professors who returned the survey was 181, but three of these professors completed the demographic information and neglected to complete the survey. One of these professors noted that he did not complete the survey because he had only been teaching at the college for six months and did not feel qualified to respond. The study sample will be described based on the 178 professors who completed the survey. Of the participating professors, 68 (or 38%) hold the position of full professor, 58 (33%) are assistant professors, 29 (16%) are associate professors, one (.6%) is part-time, and four (2.2%) did not identify their faculty rank. One hundred and sixteen (or 65%) were male, 54 (30%) were female, and eight (5%) did not identify their sex. With regard to the number of years taught at the college: 99 professors (or 56%) have taught at the college for ten years of more, 29 (16%) have taught for seven to nine years, 17 (10%) have taught for four to six years, and 33 (18%) have taught for one to three years. The racial background and department were requested, but this information was omitted because many professors did not reveal this information.

Overall Attitude

In answering the question of attitude toward basic skills students on the whole, the writer concluded that the professors were undecided about their feelings toward these students. This conclusion was based on the fact that the group mean fell in the undecided range and most of the percentages reported for the individual items were heavily weighted toward an undecided response.

This overall undecided attitude toward these students may be attributed to the fact that professors have never been approached on this matter before and were uncertain about their feelings and attitudes. Naturally, if a person is undecided about an issue s/he will not take a stand. Another factor which may have influenced this noncommittal attitude may have to do with the fact that basic skills students have only been identified in the last four years as a result of their scores on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test. The "newness" of this category of college students may have been reflected in their attitudes. In addition to these reasons, another consideration which could have influenced this undecided attitude was the political nature of the issue of basic skills students.

The limitations of the survey as discussed in Chapter One may have influenced the lack of returns and the noncommittal attitude. Although the definition of basic skills students was stated in many of the survey statements, a clear and concise definition should have been provided in the cover letter along with more detailed background information as to the purpose of this study.

Although a strong attitude was not uncovered, this investigator feels that with a revision of the survey, a strong attitude could be disclosed. The survey

directions requested professors to circle the response option which represented their attitude, but in many cases, professors provided lengthy written comments, also. While the overall attitude represented uncertainty about these students, very strong attitudes were expressed through these comments. Thus, the writer would strongly suggest a further investigation of this preliminary study.

Attitudes Toward Survey Variables

Four variables were included in the survey and the study sample showed a slightly inconsistent attitude toward basic skills students based on these variables. Based on the mean scores and the percentages reported, the professors indicated a slightly negative attitude toward two of the variables and a slightly positive attitude toward the other two variables.

Low means were revealed for the variables which identified the attitudes of professors toward the admission of basic skills students to college and their view of the academic standards of a college where basic skills students are present. The mean scores fell in the range of undecided to negative and suggested that basic skills students should not be admitted to college (specifically four year colleges) and affect the academic standards of a college. The writer concluded that this slightly negative attitude indicated that some professors may resent these basic skills students because they have lowered the academic standards of this college. An attitude of resentment towards these students may indeed exist if professors feel that the college is looked upon as a "second rate" institution as a result of the presence of these students. In looking at one

particular item in the survey (see item #3 in Appendix II), which was listed under the survey variable, attitude toward admission of basic skills students, professors displayed a very strong attitude with regard to having basic skills students attend a junior college to learn these basic skills. This item was referred to because 50 percent of the professors indicated a positive attitude toward this item. Thus, this writer concluded that an underlying negative attitude toward these students does exist since many of the professors feel that the basic skills students should attend a junior college first. Although the overall attitude was one of indecision, when individual items were analyzed, negative views were reflected in many of the items.

A higher mean score was reported for the variable which determined professors' perceptions of these students. The mean score for this variable indicated an undecided to slightly positive attitude. These perceptions seemed to indicate that some professors viewed the basic skills students as motivated and capable of success. The writer concluded that professors did not want to make negative statements about these particular students.

The highest mean score reported for all of the variables dealt with the professors' view of the progress of a class when basic skills students are present. This positive attitude implied that professors do not feel that basic skills students affect or influence the progress of a class in any way. The writer concluded that this attitude may have resulted because professors have no way of knowing whether or not they have these students in their classes. This attitude could also have been attributed to the fact that professors do not want to admit that they have these students in their

classes. It was felt that this survey variable may have caused confusion and did not contribute to the survey.

A contradiction seemed to exist when trying to interpret these attitudes toward the variables. Professors did not take a definite stand and viewed two variables slightly positive and two slightly negative. This inconsistency was identified because professors indicated that basic skills students lowered the academic standards of the college, but, on the other hand, they did not feel that these students influence the progress of a class. The writer concluded that the positive attitude toward the class progress may be a reflection of the professors' failure to address the issue. As stated previously, these attitudes were slight and, so, the writer felt that the inconsistency in attitude should be referred to, but not considered too seriously.

Variables of Sex, Faculty Rank, and Years Taught

The survey was described in terms of the variables: sex, faculty rank, and years taught at the college and did not reveal strong attitudes. The majority of professors indicated an undecided attitude, but more professors reported a negative attitude toward basic skills students than a positive attitude. Since the highest percentages of attitudes fell in the undecided range, attitudes were reported in terms of positive and negative to see if there was a strong difference in opinion. Professors who have taught at the college for ten years or more indicated the highest percentage of attitude which fell in the negative range. Full professors indicated the highest percentage of negative attitude among the groups, and male professors, also, indicated a more negative attitude. The writer concluded that these particular groups reported

the highest degree of negative attitude because they consisted of the largest number of respondents in each category.

The writer further concluded that the male, full professor who has taught at the college for ten years or more may have been apt to reveal a more negative attitude because he is more secure in his position than many of the other groups. Many professors in the other groups may have felt hesitant about responding strongly because of the political nature of basic skills students. Full professors indicated a negative attitude while assistant professors revealed a more positive attitude. The writer concluded that this split in attitude may be attributed to job security, also. A certain percentage of each group revealed positive attitudes, but these attitudes were not emphasized because the negative attitude outweighed the positive in most cases.

Summary and Suggestions

This stu[illegible]'s major conclusion was that professors were undecided in their attitude toward basic skills students. When the survey variables and the variables of sex, faculty rank, and years taught were reported, the largest percentages of attitude were undecided, but professors indicated a more negative than positive attitude. The overall attitude of indecision seemed to point to apathy on the part of the professors concerning this issue. All professors appeared to need to come to terms with their attitudes toward basic skills students.

Continued use of a revised form of the instrument developed for this study is in order. An item analysis would be suggested to improve the statements in the survey. Future research in this area would include surveying all professors in the state colleges in New

Jersey where Basic Skills Programs are offered.

Several interesting questions might be explored in areas related to the study of faculty's attitudes toward basic skills students. Do professors feel that there is a decline in skills among college students? How do professors feel about this decline in skills? What do professors think about the criteria that is used for admission to a four year school? Do professors feel that the role of the four year college is changing? How do basic skills students feel about their college experience, their professors? How do basic skills students view themselves? And, finally, what are the attitudes of basic skills students in relation to how they feel professors perceive them?

It is the writer's contention that professors should come to terms with their attitudes toward basic skills students since so many of these students are present in the state colleges. Basic skills students have serious academic problems and do not need the added pressure of negative attitudes. It is also the writer's feeling that these students need more academic assistance and understanding than the typical college student. Thus, professors need to identify their attitude, become aware of their attitudes, and possibly be provided with workshops to inform the professors of the effect their attitude may have on these students.

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APPENDIX I

SUMMARY TABLES

Distribution of Percentages for Each Item

Item #	SA*	A*	U*	D*	SD*
1	40.4%	28.1%	10.7%	13.5%	7.3%
2	7.9	10.7	17.4	33.7	30.3
3	20.2	29.8	21.9	18.5	9.6
4	19.7	35.4	32.6	10.1	2.2
5	14.6	28.1	13.5	28.7	15.2
6	5.1	10.7	15.2	25.8	43.3
7	5.6	16.3	28.1	30.3	19.7
8	18.5	23.0	15.7	27.0	15.7
9	2.8	15.7	35.4	31.5	14.6
10	27.0	31.5	15.2	14.6	11.8
11	10.1	12.4	33.1	31.5	12.9
12	19.7	21.3	31.5	17.4	10.1
13	1.7	10.1	66.3	16.9	5.1
14	37.6	34.8	14.0	6.2	7.3
15	--	16.3	64.0	15.7	3.9
16	4.5	18.0	33.7	29.2	14.6

*SA= strongly agree
A= agree
U= undecided
D= disagree
SD= strongly disagree

Mean Scores for Individual Items

Item #	Mean Score
1	2.19
2	2.32
3	2.67
4	3.60
5	3.01
6	2.08
7	3.42
8	3.02
9	3.39
10	3.47
11	3.25
12	3.23
13	2.87
14	2.11
15	2.93
16	3.31

APPENDIX

ATTITUDE SURVEY

MONTCLAIR STATE COLLEGE
Upper Montclair, New Jersey
Reading Center

ATTITUDE SURVEY

As a graduate student in the Reading Program at Montclair State College, I am conducting a research study to partially fulfill the requirements for the Masters of Arts Degree in Reading. Under the supervision of Drs. Brunner and Schantz, I intend to measure professors' attitudes towards basic skills students. I would greatly appreciate your cooperation in completing the attached survey and the demographic information below. Please return these sheets by campus mail within one week to:

Teresa Buckley-Byrne
c/o Reading Center, College Hall

I am most grateful for your cooperation in assisting me in this research study.

Thank you.

Teresa Buckley-Byrne

Please check the appropriate information below:

Faculty Rank:
_____ full-time professor
_____ assistant professor
_____ instructor
_____ associate
_____ adjunct part-time

Sex:
_____ male
_____ female

Years taught at Montclair State College:
_____ 1 - 3 years
_____ 4 - 6 years
_____ 7 - 9 years
_____ 10 years or more

Ethnic background:
_____ white
_____ black
_____ Hispanic
_____ other

Please list the department in which you teach: _____

Do you have basic skills students in your classes?
_____ yes
_____ no
_____ don't know

ATTITUDE SURVEY

Please circle the number which represents the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements.

Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

1.	Four year colleges should be restricted to students who are academically prepared.	5 4 3 2 1
2.	The academic standards of a four year college are not affected by the admission of basic skills students.	5 4 3 2 1
3.	If a student has a deficiency in basic skills, he should attend a junior college to gain these skills.	5 4 3 2 1
4.	Basic skills students have the ability to succeed in college.	5 4 3 2 1
5.	The presence of basic skills students in a four year college indicates that the college's academic standards have been lowered.	5 4 3 2 1
6.	A student should be admitted to a four year college even though he has not mastered the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics.	5 4 3 2 1
7.	Students who have not been academically motivated in high school generally do not become motivated by the college experience.	5 4 3 2 1
8.	Both two year and four year colleges should provide basic skills programs.	5 4 3 2 1
9.	Basic skills students who have encountered much academic difficulty in high school will not strive for high achievement in college.	5 4 3 2 1
10.	The progress of my class and my choice of books and course materials is not affected by the poor academic preparation of basic skills students.	5 4 3 2 1
11.	Based on my experience, I feel that basic skills students hinder the progress of my class.	5 4 3 2 1
12.	Basic skills students should have the right to be educated at a four year college.	5 4 3 2 1
13.	I have found that basic skills students have a strong desire to succeed in college since their prior educational experiences were not very successful.	5 4 3 2 1
14.	Mastery of basic skills should be used as criteria for admission to a four year college.	5 4 3 2 1
15.	Basic skills students are academically motivated.	5 4 3 2 1
16.	A student who was not academically prepared in basic skills in high school will not succeed in college.	5 4 3 2 1